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THE LESSON OF THE SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS.

A PAPER
READ BY
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AT THE

*Annual Meeting of the Church of England School
Teachers' Association for West Kent,*

AUGUST 12, 1871.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

MAIDSTONE :
PRINTED AT THE JOURNAL OFFICE, MIDDLE ROW.
1871.

INTRODUCTION.

I have published this Address because I was requested to do so, by those who listened to it, not because I think there is likely to be found in it anything that has not been heard before by those who are interested in Education. I have spoken strongly on the danger of trusting our religious teaching to the School Boards, but I would not have it supposed that I am insensible to the gallant efforts which have been made, and are being made, by Churchmen upon these Boards, to preserve the liberty for the amount of such instruction which the Act allows. Nor would I willingly omit to notice, what was well observed at our Annual Meeting, how high is the character of those who have been elected on the School Boards, and with what public spirit these Boards have generally applied themselves to their difficult duties.

Still the conviction remains strong upon my mind, and I am desirous (so far as I may) to impress it upon others, that unless our voluntary Schools are maintained in full efficiency—both religious and secular—the Education of England will never meet the best desires of the best portion of her people.

J. G. T.

Falconhurst, August, 1871.

THE LESSON OF THE SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS.

IN meeting the members of this Association at the end of another year, it seems obvious to take some review of the events which have occurred since we met last year, and enjoyed the generous hospitality of our kind friend, Mr. Saint. On that occasion you kindly received me for the first time as your President, and I addressed you on your position and duties in connection with a national system of education, which had just been established by that celebrated statute, the Elementary Education Act, which will long make famous the Session of 1870.

The twelve months which have elapsed since then have justified the importance which I asked you to attach to the new condition of things under which you would have to work : and here I cannot forbear to express the gratification which I feel at the strenuous efforts which, in this Diocese, as in others, have been made to supply the deficiencies in our church school accommodation, and so to avoid, as far as possible, the necessary evils of schools subject to the new Boards. It is also a subject of very great satisfaction that real attention has been bestowed upon the need of providing for the inspection of religious teaching, which the State has so long provided, and has now withdrawn. Connected with this, I may mention the plans which are in progress for the religious examination of pupil teachers, and for encouraging in our schools a better acquaintance with the treasures of our Book of Common Prayer than I fear is commonly found. On each of these subjects it would not be hard to dilate.

But the particular point on which I shall detain you for a few minutes, and which may, I hope, lead

to a discussion not unprofitable, is the result of the election of the School Boards, with the moral which it teaches us. I shall not discuss the merits of School Boards, on which, I think, you know my sentiments sufficiently. But I will remind you of the facts which the newspapers have recorded. A large number of these Boards have been elected, and I observe that Mr. Forster, in moving the Education Vote the other day, announced that 96 boroughs (out of 220) besides about 210 other parishes,* had elected School Boards. This is a fact of which Mr. Forster is not unnaturally rather proud, because it confirms the anticipation which he had formed, that in many parts of the country public opinion would support him in making such a provision for education, even without any pressure being brought to bear from the central authority.

Few, probably, of those who hear me will share that satisfaction, but we are here to deal with facts, not with opinions ; and the fact that such a large number of School Boards has been established within twelve months from the passing of the Education Act, is a great and important one. That the number will increase, we cannot doubt, though I do not believe that they will become universal, as the secular party desire, and confidently predict. But I am bound to say that I think we must show some reason for preferring our voluntary schools, beyond the rate-paying reason, if we are to hope to maintain them, and that is why I have taken the liberty of urging this subject upon your attention to-day.

Let us look, then, to the general result of the elections, and to the limits within which the Boards are confined, to see whether the education they will give *can* be such as to satisfy us, who are, by conviction, as well as by profession, members of Christ's Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as it has long existed in this land, free, as we believe,

* Not. (A.)



from the innovations and corruptions of Rome, and free also from the spirit of ecclesiastical disorder, which, unhappily, characterized the Reformation in some of the other parts of Europe.

And first, I would make this admission, that, so far as I have been able to gather, the elections to the School Boards have been very fair. I mean that all parties are fairly represented upon them. This was, no doubt, due to the operation of what is called the cumulative vote, which was happily incorporated with the Education Act of last year, and which the House of Commons this year, with such remarkable unanimity,† resolved to maintain. But then, let us observe, what results we have arrived at. We have bodies elected, containing elements almost as discordant as the House of Commons itself comprehends, and the very nature of the case demands that the religion of such bodies should be almost entirely colourless and negative.

If the majority alone had been represented, no doubt we might have had in some places strong Church Boards, in others strong Wesleyan Boards, in others again, strong Roman Catholic Boards. And then, even with the unhappy limitation of liberty (as I shall always consider it) of clause 14,‡ we might have had definite religious teaching, even without distinctive formularies. But under present circumstances, the thing seems to me impossible.

You have observed, no doubt, the strength of the hold which the Church still has upon our populations, as evinced by the ease with which Church candidates have been elected on School Boards in large towns, often at the head of the poll, and I daresay you have been pleased, as I have, to see that the national respect for the clergy, which noisy demagogues are fond of denying, has shown itself in the fact that the rector or vicar of the parish has not infrequently been elected chairman of the Board. But you cannot have failed to be im-

pressed (I had almost said to be amused, only that “our unhappy divisions” ought not to amuse, but to grieve us) at the strange medley which the constitution of these Boards presents. When we have not the members only, but the ministers, of “all denominations” sitting side by side on the same Board, assisted by what are called “working men’s candidates,” who, I am afraid, often affect an indifference to all religion, which I do not believe the working classes really feel, the result must be either a perpetual conflict, when the subject of religion comes up, or a pretty complete negation. Now, no bodies, except perhaps the House of Commons, like to be perpetually fighting, and so it generally happens that the subjects on which they cannot agree are pretty well ignored.

It may, of course, be answered, that there is much religious truth upon which almost all Christians agree, and that the School Boards will rightly interpret the wishes of the country by giving religious instruction to all children whose parents do not object. It may be so, and I trust most sincerely that it will be so. But I will make two remarks;

1. That I doubt whether any instruction can be satisfactory to Church-people which, in the words of the bye-laws of the London School Board,§ is not “to attach the children to any particular denomination;” and 2. That the religious character of the School Board schools depends very much upon the efforts which we make in our voluntary schools.

On this point I should like to quote a passage from an article in the last *Quarterly Review* (for July, 1871) on “The New School Boards,” which I commend to the perusal of any who may have an opportunity of seeing it. “The religious teaching of the “new schools is encumbered with much difficulty, “because of the condition of ‘undenominationalism,’” (which is most barbarous, the word or the idea?) “which is held to be implied in the Cowper-Temple

“ clause. There is an active and intelligent party,
“ who will watch for such difficulties, eagerly en-
“ deavouring to exaggerate them where they exist, to
“ create them where they do not. At present, the majority
“ of the Boards, and of the school-managers whom they
“ appoint, will be honestly anxious to work the sys-
“ tem efficiently, and may expect to find many
“ difficulties vanish as they grapple with them. If
“ the old schools shall exist, preserving a religious
“ tone, and offering an easy refuge from actual or
“ virtual secularism, then, we believe, their attempt
“ will succeed. Even for the sake of self-preservation,
“ to say nothing of the contagion of a noble example,
“ the new schools will preserve, under all difficulties,
“ a substantially religious character. Let the volun-
“ tary schools decay and vanish, and we do not feel
“ so sure of this result. The example of the United
“ States is not encouraging. It is generally known
“ that the common schools have there become virtually
“ secular; in ordinary cases, nothing is left, except
“ the reading of a passage of Scripture, and the use
“ of some very general prayer at the opening of the
“ School. But it is not so well known, that originally
“ the system was intended to ‘provide religious in-
“ struction for all children,’ and that it has gradually
“ faded into what it is, because it is provided that
“ this religious instruction shall not ‘favour the tenets
“ of any particular sect of Christians.’” (This is
ominously like the language to which we have been lately
accustomed.) “ We trust that such might not be the
“ case in England, if the new schools were left in un-
“ disputed possession of the field; but we cannot feel
“ sure that the same causes will not operate to produce
“ the same results. Doubly, then, we believe, that
“ the old schools are of paramount value here.
“ They can work most effectually for religious instruc-
“ tion themselves. Most of them are connected with
“ the Church, and all the prestige and influence of

“ the Church is brought to bear upon their religious tone, while the absence of all fetters upon the religious teaching should help it to greater definiteness and vigour. But besides this, their reflex action on the new schools is of at least equal importance. To lose it would be, to our view, nothing short of a calamity to the Christianity of England.” I think you will agree with me that this is an important and a suggestive extract: and in enlarging upon one or two of the topics which it suggests, I will conclude the remarks which I fear may have detained you too long. It seems to me that we are all sadly prone to forget the lessons which experience should teach us. This, which is almost a common-place with preachers on matters of personal religion, is equally true with regard to the conduct of nations and communities.

Thus, for example, in England we are ready to rush into a system of “unsectarian” teaching, without reflecting that the system has been tried by our intelligent friends on the other side of the Atlantic, and that the result—to religious minds—has not been successful. I trust, therefore, that none of us will be deluded by the smooth working of the School Boards, into the fancy that they *can* afford to the children of our fellow-countrymen that religious education, which, as Churchmen we are bound to offer. And again, I would respectfully impress upon you that the best chance of preserving anything deserving the name of religious teaching in these new schools is—as the *Quarterly Reviewer* suggests—the preservation of a very high standard—may I even say the establishment of a higher standard?—in our own. For their sakes—as well as for ours—let us not “shun to declare” to our children “all the counsel of God.” I think we are apt, in our poor conception of Divine things, to fancy that we may safely teach this, and omit that, forgetting how infinitesimal after all our best knowledge is, and not recognising, what I believe to be the

truth, that whatever has been revealed to us we are bound, so far as our powers go, to communicate to those whom we teach.

Whilst I address these words to you, I feel that I am in some danger of presumption. Upon you, the teachers of this Association, falls the burden of education during many long and weary hours, amongst many discouragements, relieved, I fear too often, by scanty sympathy. I trust that no words of mine will convey the idea, which I should indeed be ashamed to entertain, that I was in a position to "lecture" you upon the arduous duties you have undertaken. But perhaps, in some respects, one whose sphere is different from yours may be able to put before you reflections on your work in a manner, which may be less familiar, and therefore more impressive, than your own constant experience would suggest. I am well aware that I cannot estimate rightly your daily difficulties, and the practical limits which confine all your labours. But perhaps I may be able to see the wider issues which are at stake. And if my short public experience teaches me anything of these matters, it is this : That the future of England depends greatly upon the hold which religion can obtain of the working classes of the country. And that, amongst the agencies by which that hold can be secured, none will be more powerful than the multiplication and the maintenance of really religious schools. I make no apology for addressing you as persons to whom such a subject will commend itself ; the circumstances of our annual meetings must remind us all that we profess to devote ourselves to the work of Education, whether as clergy, school teachers, or others, in an earnestly religious spirit. And, therefore, I will only add, that if any words of mine can have weight with you, I would most strongly urge upon all who hear me, that not religious teaching only, but the inculcation of definite religious doctrine, is now more than ever our

paramount duty. I hope we shall not be uncharitable to others: there is no need that we should be so, in order to be definite ourselves. But in days like ours, when forms of religion from which we conscientiously differ are taught very strongly, and still more when anti-religious principles are openly instilled into young and ignorant minds, it should be the high privilege of the members of the Church of England to hold up to those who have been baptized into her fold her pure and lofty standard, and to give them a "reason of the hope which is in them," which may support them through their lives. It is no elaborate system of refined theology which she imposes upon her youthful members, it is what she believes to be the necessary epitome of Divine Revelation. As such, it has been handed down to us, feebly indeed sometimes, but still without mutilation. Let us, in these anxious times, hand on the lamp of truth to those who shall succeed us, and take care that no fault of ours shall dim its brightness.

NOTE A.—The *School Board Chronicle* gives the following number of School Boards in England and Wales established up to 1st August, 1871:—Municipal Boroughs, 96; other Parishes, 172; total, 268. Besides these, several other places have applied for orders for the election of Boards.

NOTE B.—Mr. Dixon (M.P. for Birmingham), on 7th March, 1871, brought in a Bill to repeal the cumulative voting clauses of the Elementary Education Act; the Bill bore the names of Mr. Dixon, Mr. Bayley Potter, Mr. Jacob Bright, and Mr. Mun'z. Mr. Dixon moved the second reading on the 12th July, but was opposed on both sides of the House, and only supported by Mr. Vernon Harcourt. The second reading was negatived without a division.

NOTE C.—Clause 14, Subsection 2, of the Elementary Education Act, provides that "No religious catechism, or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular religious denomination, shall be taught in the School," i.e., in a School "provided by a School Board."

NOTE D.—The following is the 10th Regulation of the London School Board, with regard to Schools under their management: "In all Schools provision may be made for giving effect to the following Resolution of the Board, passed on July 26th, 1871: 'That in accordance with the general practice of existing elementary schools, provision may be made for offering prayer and using hymns in Schools provided by the Board at the 'time or times' when, according to Section 7 Sub-section 2. of the Elementary Education Act, "religious observances" may be practised. That the arrangements for such "religious observances" be left to the discretion of the teacher and managers of such Schools, with the right of appeal to the Board by teacher, managers, parents, or ratepayers of the district: Provided always, That in the offering of any prayers and in the use of any hymns, the provisions of the Act in Sections 7 and 14 be strictly observed, both in letter and in spirit, and that no attempt be made to attach children to any particular denomination'"











